

Message Text

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43

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4923

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 5155

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: PANAMA TO JOIN NON-ALIGNED GROUP

REF: A. STATE 190374; B. PANAMA 4823

SUMMARY: THROUGH PUBLICITY AND TORRIJOS' CONFIRMATION OF INTENT, GOP DECISION TO ENTER NON-ALIGNED GROUP HAS BEEN MADE FIRM. WE HAVE DISCUSSED ISSUE WITH PRESIDENT LAKAS, GOP OFFICIALS AND OTHERS CLOSE TO TOP LEADERS ALONG LINES SUGGESTED REF. A, AND HAVE RECEIVED REPLIES INDICATING THAT IMPACT OF SNYDER AMENDMENT AND STALLED NEGOTIATIONS MADE IT NECESSARY FOR TORRIJOS TO SEEK WAYS OF BUYING TRANQUILITY IN WHICH TO CONTINUE PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS. MOREOVER, WE WERE TOLD PANAMA SHOULD BE FREE TO DEAL WITH NATIONS, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF DEVELOPING WORLD WHICH ARE GIVING PANAMA STRONG SUPPORT. WE HAVE RECEIVED ASSURANCES, HOWEVER, THAT PANAMA IS AWARE OF SENTIMENT OF U.S. CONGRESS AND PUBLIC CONCERNING NON-ALIGNED GROUP AND WILL ACT WITH MODERATION IN THAT BODY. END

1. PANAMANIAN PRESS HAS ACCORDED RELATIVELY PROMINENT COVERAGE TO LIMA NON-ALIGNED GROUP (NAG) MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE, BOTH PRIOR AND SUBSEQUENT TO TORRIJOS' PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT ON AUGUST 7 OF PANAMA'S INTENTION TO JOIN THE
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GROUP (REF B). EDITORIALS AND COLUMNISTS HAVE UNIFORMLY

FAVORED SUCH STEP, OFFERING AS JUSTIFICATION THAT (A) IT WOULD STRENGTHEN PANAMA'S HAND IN DEALING WITH U.S. ON CANAL TREATY; (B) NAG INCLUDES MANY NATIONS FAVORABLY DISPOSED TO PANAMANIAN CAUSE; AND (C) ACTION WOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT PANAMA IS NOT A SATELLITE OF U.S. OR ANY OTHER MAJOR COUNTRY'S FOREIGN POLICY BUT RATHER IS OPEN TO ALL NATIONS, PARTICULARLY OTHER DEVELOPING NATIONS. PRESS COVERAGE SINCE AUGUST 7 ANNOUNCEMENT INCLUDED EFE RELEASE OF AUGUST 10 FROM LIMA WHICH QUOTED PANAMANIAN AMBASSADOR THERE AS SAYING, AFTER TELCON WITH TORRIJOS, THAT PANAMA WOULD APPLY FOR NAG MEMBERSHIP IN LIMA AND THAT TORRIJOS MIGHT PRESENT APPLICATION PERSONALLY.

2. SOURCES CLOSE TO TOP LEVEL GOP LEADERS HAVE INFORMED US THAT DECISION TO JOIN NON-ALIGNED WAS MADE DURING THE TWO-WEEK PERIOD FOLLOWING NEWS OF SNYDER AMENDMENT AND AMID FEARS HERE THAT U.S. EXECUTIVE'S COMMITMENT TO TREATY WAS ERODING. TORRIJOS HAD PREVIOUSLY MADE HIMSELF POLITICALLY VULNERABLE BY EXPRESSING CONFIDENCE IN NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND U.S. OFFICIALS AND HAD BEEN FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF MODERATES. HE BELIEVED THAT IF NEGOTIATIONS WERE GOING TO FALTER OR BE PROTRACTED, HE NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN HIS NATIONALIST AND LEFTIST SUPPORT. THEREFORE HE DECIDED TO TRY TO BUY TRANQUILITY WITH THE LEFT AND NATIONALISTS, IN ORDER TO CONTINUE HIS MODERATE APPROACH TO TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. REPRESENTATIVES OF ULTRA-NATIONALISTS AND LEFTISTS HAD LONG BEEN URGING THAT PANAMA JOIN THE NON-ALIGNED. TACK, WE UNDERSTAND, WAS A KEY ADVOCATE OF THE MOVE. ADDITIONALLY, PANAMANIAN HAVE POINTED OUT TO US THAT PANAMA'S ROLE AS A WORLD CROSSROADS AND COMMERCIAL AND BANKING CENTER REQUIRES THAT IT DEAL WITH ALL NATIONS. WE HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY ASSURED THAT ACT OF JOINING NON-ALIGNED GROUP IS NOT DIRECTED AGAINST U.S. AND THAT PANAMA WILL ADHERE TO POSITION IT DEEMS BEST FOR ITS INTERESTS. WHEN STANDS OF NON-ALIGNED GROUP DO NOT FIT PANAMA'S INTEREST THEY WILL BE REJECTED.

3. WE HAVE DISCUSSED DECISION WITH PRESIDENT LAKAS, SEVERAL FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS, AND OTHER PANAMANIAN CLOSE TO TORRIJOS AND LAKAS AND HAVE RECEIVED BASIC EXPLANATION GIVEN ABOVE. IN DISCUSSIONS WE POINTED OUT THAT THIS MOVE WILL BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WITH U.S. CONGRESS AND PUBLIC. WE HAVE NOT, CONFIDENTIAL

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HOWEVER, ATTEMPTED TO PERSUADE THEM TO REVERSE THE DECISION BECAUSE WE BELIEVE SUCH EFFORTS WOULD HAVE HAD NEGATIVE, NOT POSITIVE EFFECT.

4. UNIVERSITY RECTOR AND TREATY ADVISER ROMULO ESCOBAR IN DINNER CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF AUGUST 21 REPEATED ASSURANCES THAT PANAMA WOULD ACT MODERATELY IN NAG. PANAMA, HE SAID, WOULD SOLIDLY OPPOSE ANY ACTION TO EXPEL ISRAEL FROM INTERNATION-

AL ORGANIZATIONS. GOP WOULD NOT HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH PUERTO
RICAN ISSUE, ALTHOUGH PANAMANIAN STUDENT AND LEFTIST GROUPS
WOULD ECHO THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT'S DEMANDS (ESCOBAR SAID HE
HAD BEEN DESIGNATED BY TORRIJOS TO RECEIVE REPRESENTATIVES OF
PR LIBERATION GROUP RECENTLY).
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